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**The Ku Klux Klan in  
Eastern Kansas during the 1920's**

**BY**

**LILA LEE JONES**

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## The Ku Klux Klan in Eastern Kansas during the 1920's

by

Lila Lee Jones \*

### INTRODUCTION

The idea that lawfully constituted authorities cannot cope with problems of public safety, crime, racial unrest, or immorality is a recurring theme in American history. Some Americans have responded to real or illusory crises by organizing outside the established political system to impose their concept of law upon the community. These "citizen bands" have appeared, disappeared, and reappeared at frequent intervals to excite and confuse the American people. One group meeting this description is the Ku Klux Klan, a secret order which usurped the law during Reconstruction, disappeared, then reappeared in the 1920's to produce public division and organized conflict until it disappeared from the national scene in the 1930's.

The development and aims of the Klan can be sharply examined through a concentrated "grass roots" history. This study of the Klan during the 1920's, therefore, focuses on the counties of Douglas, Miami, Linn, Bourbon, and Crawford in eastern Kansas. Indeed, it has been suggested that Kansans often exemplify the sentiments of the American people at a particular time. John J. Ingalls wrote:

For a generation Kansas has been the testing-ground for every experiment in morals, politics, and social life. Doubt of all existing institutions has been respectable. Nothing has been venerable or revered merely because it exists or has endured.<sup>1</sup>

By examining the motives which led many leading citizens of eastern Kansas towns to become knights of the Ku Klux Klan, a key may be found to explain the rapid expansion of the secret order to nearly every town in Kansas by 1924 with close to 100,000 members, with 4,600 in Crawford County alone.<sup>2</sup> By studying the activities of the Klan in Kansas, supporting evidence for the nationwide acceptance of

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\* The author is a member of the faculty of Louisburg, Kansas, High School. This study originated as a master's thesis in History, completed in 1972, at Emporia Kansas State College, under the direction of Dr. Patrick G. O'Brien.

<sup>1</sup> John James Ingalls, "Kansas 1541-1891," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 86 (April 1893), 707.

<sup>2</sup> *The Independent* [Mulberry, Kansas], March 27, 1925, p. 2.



the organization may be discovered. A thorough study of the Kansas Klan may also determine if the secret order was a product of the confusing times following World War I as well as an extension of older secret fraternal orders which had similar aims and ideals. Finally, by studying the decline of the Invisible Empire in eastern Kansas, the causes for the failure and disappearance of this order based on anti-democratic principles may also be discovered.<sup>3</sup>

Because no history of the Ku Klux Klan in eastern Kansas has been written, the major sources of this study will be contemporary newspapers and interviews with those who lived in the area during the "twenties." Since it is very difficult to get those who are still living who were alleged members of the Klan to admit that they were once klansmen, these primary sources in this area are practically nonexistent. Two newspapers, one representing the Klan viewpoint and the other with an anti-Klan expression, are used extensively in this study. They are *The Independent*, a Klan newspaper first published in September 1923, and the *Mulberry News*, an older weekly, edited by Millard F. Sears, who was an outspoken opponent of the Klan. *The Independent* nearly put Sears out of business, but instead it was forced to cease publication when the Klan began to decline.

A massive revival of the Ku Klux Klan, or more likely a counterpart of the secret organization, is never an impossibility in the United States. A study of the conditions allowing the Klan to experience its successful revival in the 1920's may lead to some revealing conclusions on the probability of such a Klan revival in the future. Because the Klan nearly paralyzed the democratic processes of government and controlled the economic life of many communities in Kansas in the "twenties," it merits in-depth study.

## I

In December 1865, six restless young former Confederate army officers founded the Ku Klux Klan at Pulaski, Tennessee. It was simply a social club in the beginning. The members met in secret, called themselves klansmen, and dressed in fantastic costumes. When klansmen rode about the countryside at night, their costumes had the unexpected result of frightening many newly-freed Negroes into orderly and submissive behavior. After the Klan began to oppose Reconstruction policies, it spread to nine Southern states. Waves of violence—lynchings, beatings, burnings, and mutilations—against Negroes soon

<sup>3</sup> The reader's attention is called to the recent, capable study by Charles William Sloan, Jr., "Kansas Battles the Invisible Empire: The Legal Ouster of the KKK from Kansas, 1922-1927," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, XL, No. 3 (Autumn, 1974), 393-409.

spread throughout the South. With increasing protests, the Grand Wizard, Nathan Bedford Forrest, ordered the Klan dissolved, and when Congress followed with laws to curb the Klan in 1870-71, it slowly faded away.

According to Forrest, the Klan had been a law-and-order organization to restore authority to insecure and fearful Southern whites. The "organization was got up to protect the weak, with no political intention at all." Stanley F. Horn in the *Invisible Empire* also indicates that the clan was organized for "the protection of the Southern whites during the years when they had no other protection, and the prevention of the political overmastery of the white citizens by the blacks."<sup>2</sup> The Reconstruction Klan operated outside the law to achieve its purpose, but in the minds of Klansmen what they were doing was right and the end justified the means.

Interest in the mysterious order did not die when the Ku Klux Klan was disbanded. In 1879 Albion W. Tourgée wrote *A Fool's Errand*, a popular novel of the Reconstruction era in which the Klan played an important role. Steele MacKaye suggested collaboration with Tourgée on a dramatization of *A Fool's Errand* and the play opened at Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia on October 26, 1881. After one successful season, all efforts failed to keep the play alive.<sup>3</sup>

The twentieth century revival of the Klan has been credited by various writers to three men—Thomas Dixon, Jr., D. W. Griffith, and William J. Simmons. Dixon, a Baptist minister from North Carolina, wrote *The Clansman*, a romantic novel of the Ku Klux Klan. He adapted the novel, which portrayed the redemption of the South by the Klan, to the stage. Although his efforts in organizing a movie company to film the story failed, D. W. Griffith, Biograph's talented young director, succeeded in creating a two-hour-and-forty-five-minute epic movie of *The Clansman* which he called *The Birth of a Nation*.<sup>4</sup>

*The Birth of a Nation* was a triumph in the South, but northern viewers were indignant. The film was egged in New York City, riots opposed it in Boston, and it was almost banned by the Massachusetts legislature. In order to fight the opposition to the film, Dixon called upon President Woodrow Wilson and Chief Justice Edward White, both Southern-born, to view the movie. With their "official" approval, the picture opened again in New York City. Before it was retired to the art theatres and film clubs, *The Birth of a Nation* had grossed almost 18 million dollars. Dixon was urged to revive the fraternalistic order,

<sup>1</sup> David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865-1965* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley F. Horn, *Invisible Empire: The Story of the Ku Klux Klan 1866-1871* (Montclair, N. J.: Paterson Smith, 1969), p. 376.

<sup>3</sup> Steele MacKaye and Albion W. Tourgée, *A Fool's Errand*, ed. Dean H. Keller (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1969), pp. 1-17.

<sup>4</sup> Chalmers, pp. 23-26.

but when it was revived, it was by a man who had failed at almost everything he had ever tried.<sup>5</sup>

William J. Simmons was Alabama-born and reared in the tradition of the Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan. He dreamed for years of founding a fraternal order based on Klan principles before he successfully revived the Invisible Empire. After twelve years in the ministry, the Alabama Conference of the Methodist Church voted in 1912 to deny him a pulpit because of inefficiency and moral impairment. He tried his hand at selling for a time and finally found his calling in the field of fraternal organizing. He joined the Woodmen of the World, several varieties of Masons, a veteran's organization, and a score of other fraternal societies, as well as the Congregational and Missionary Baptist Churches. He held twenty-three degrees in seven fraternal orders. When asked his profession, Simmons always answered, "I am a fraternalist."<sup>6</sup>

Simmons was not content with simply membership in various orders. His ultimate goal was to found his own fraternal society. When he was hospitalized for three months after an automobile accident, he worked out the details for the twentieth-century Ku Klux Klan. In an interview with William G. Shepherd in 1928, Simmons explained that his idea for the motto, "Non Silba Sed Anthar," was part Latin and part Saxon. Simmons also "dreamed up" the emblems, tokens, rituals, and regalia during his recuperation. His ideas were copyrighted and he later received \$90,000 for the copyrights.<sup>7</sup>

The first fiery cross of the revived Ku Klux Klan was burned on the top of Stone Mountain near Atlanta on an icy-cold Thanksgiving day in 1915. Sixteen Atlanta businessmen took the oath before a makeshift altar and became the first members of the Invisible Empire.<sup>8</sup>

Neither Thomas Dixon, Jr., nor D. W. Griffith had the slightest idea that *The Birth of a Nation* would trigger a revival of the Klan in the South. When the film was scheduled to open in Atlanta on December 6, 1915, "Colonel" Simmons published an advertisement announcing the formation of the Ku Klux Klan which read, "Knights of the Ku Klux Klan A High Class Order for Men of Intelligence and Character The World's Greatest Secret, Social, Patriotic, Fraternal, Beneficiary Order."<sup>9</sup>

The advertisement was crudely drawn, but soon ninety men had paid ten dollars to become members of Klan Number 1 in Atlanta. The members purchased a costume for \$6.50, and forty members signed for \$53,000 in life insurance.<sup>10</sup> Simmons said later, "there were

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>6</sup> William G. Shepherd, "How I Put Over the Klan," *Collier's* XXCII, No. 2 (July 14, 1928), p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*; the motto was translated by Simmons to mean "Not for self, but for others."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, the advertisement is shown on p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

no rough neckers, rowdies, nor yellow-streaks admitted. It was an order of and for men who were one hundred per cent American and no other."<sup>11</sup>

The Klan used various publicity schemes at first to attract attention. Simmons used cheap press-agent tricks to lead klansmen to believe that there were 7,000,000 members in the order instead of 600,000.<sup>12</sup> To create an air of mystery about the Klan, Simmons claimed, "I am he who from the realm of the unknown wrested the solemn secret from the grasp of night and became the sovereign Imperial Master of the Great, Lost Mystery."<sup>13</sup>

Events of World War I provided the Klan with its direction after the war. Klansmen were urged to contribute to the war effort. Enemy aliens, slackers, idlers, unpatriotic citizens, immoral women, and evil-doers of every description were special targets of the Ku Klux Klan. Yet, by 1920 the Invisible Empire was still a close-knit organization with only a few thousand members. New members had to be recruited if it was to become the national beneficent order that Simmons intended.

Simmons was probably sincerely interested in the welfare of America and planned to establish hospitals, schools, and other beneficial institutions; yet, he was too much of a dreamer to organize and direct a powerful membership campaign on a nation-wide basis. For this work he engaged a fraternal salesman and publicity man, Edward Young Clarke, and his business associate, Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler, to head a huge membership drive. Clarke and Mrs. Tyler immediately organized a recruiting army to fan out over the country to enlist new members for a ten dollar membership fee each. By 1921 about 85,000 members ("at ten dollars a head") had accepted knighthood in the Invisible Empire.<sup>14</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan became a flourishing business under the direction of Clarke and Mrs. Tyler, but by September 1921 they were under investigation for immoral conduct, and Klan finances were the subject of close public scrutiny in a series of articles in the *New York World* and the *Journal-American*. The hooded order was next brought before a Congressional investigating committee to answer charges of illegal commercial gains by a beneficent order. Although the Klan invited investigation, the inquiry was dropped when a bill was introduced to investigate the finances of other fraternal orders. The publicity from the investigation was exactly what the order needed. The Ku Klux Klan began to add members steadily from that time onward.

The Simmons, Clarke, and Tyler partnership was in a precarious position in the spring of 1922. Tyler and Clarke were again charged with immoral conduct and the former resigned. Simmons, who held both the title of Emperor and Imperial Wizard, was persuaded to take

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Chalmers, p. 35.



a vacation. Clarke, as Imperial Wizard pro-tempore, came to rely more and more upon ex-detective Fred Savage and Dallas dentist Hiram Wesley Evans to run the Klan. While Simmons was slowly losing his power in the Klan, Clarke was challenged by ambitious klansmen who were more concerned about their own welfare than the good of the organization. When Simmons returned to his desk in the fall of 1922, he was forced to call a national Klonvocation.

At the Klonvocation, the dreamer Simmons clashed with practical men in the Klan and came out second best. "Colonel" William Joseph Simmons had built up his fraternal order to the point that it was taking in \$35,000 daily, then he suddenly found himself on the outside looking in. In a surprise move, the Dallas dentist, Hiram Wesley Evans, secured enough votes to be elected Imperial Wizard. Simmons was permitted to retain the title of Emperor. It was an empty title, however, for the Imperial Wizard controlled the purse, and thus the Ku Klux Klan. Simmons no longer controlled the order he had founded.<sup>15</sup>

In an interview in 1928, Simmons explained that he tried to warn klansmen how his order had been swindled away from him in order to make money for the new leaders. "I tried to tell klansmen," he said, "what had happened to the Klan, but I couldn't get a hearing."<sup>16</sup> Then Simmons wrote a book to tell klansmen the truth, but Evans issued an order banishing anyone who read it. Simmons concluded, "it [the Klan] is dead to every original program and purpose."<sup>17</sup>

By 1922 the Klan, under its new leadership, had begun to spread rapidly into nearly every state in the Union. That year the Klan first made its appearance in eastern Kansas. It is this Ku Klux Klan, under new leadership and with a new purpose, with which we are concerned in this study.

## II

Governor Henry J. Allen was a bitter enemy of the Invisible Empire before it was organized in Kansas. He was aware of Klan activities in other states, and he was determined to oust the organization should it establish itself in the state. The governor was notified in July 1921 that klansmen from Oklahoma and Texas were moving northward to organize the Klan in southern Kansas.<sup>18</sup>

The Klan unit at Pittsburg in Crawford County was among the first organized in Kansas. Soon, other railroad towns, including Arkansas

City and Coffeyville, had Klans which were controlled from the regional sub-office in Kansas City, Missouri. In a clandestine effort to conceal the Klan's expansion into Kansas, local organizations often were assigned names such as the "Sunflower Club" of Wyandotte County, "The Bourbon County Industrial Association" of Fort Scott, and the "South-west Trade Association" of Caney.<sup>19</sup>

Doubt was quickly eliminated concerning the Klan's existence in southeastern Kansas. On February 16, 1922, 250 members of the Ku Klux Klan marched openly with a flaming cross at the head of their parade in Caney.<sup>20</sup> In May 1922, Dr. Harry Graham of Boston, Massachusetts, debated the merits of the Ku Klux Klan with Harry B. Burton, mayor of Kansas City. Graham, a Klan organizer, held that "the Klan worked for racial purity, white supremacy, the welfare of the nation, and the constitution of the United States," but Burton insisted that the Klan was "un-American, cowardly, and oppressive." Shortly after this debate, organizers appeared before the ministerial association in Emporia and declared that the Klan upheld law and order, opposed Catholicism, and stated that members were recruited chiefly from among the Masonic order. An overwhelming majority of the Emporia ministers denounced the Klan.<sup>21</sup>

On September 5, 1922, hundreds of white-robed klansmen held a meeting at Winfield after a plane dropped pamphlets announcing the place and date of the meeting. Initiation ceremonies for 200 new members were held a week later near Newton, where the first issue of the *Jay Hawk American*, a Klan newspaper, appeared on the streets.<sup>22</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Governor Allen was notified that some Arkansas City residents had been threatened with tar and feathers, for alleged offenses, in letters signed by the Ku Klux Klan. Allen sent J. A. Mc Dermott, judge of the Industrial Court, to investigate activities in Arkansas City.

In October 1922, two young women members of the Methodist Church in Prescott, Kansas, were brought before the church congregation to be tried for unbecoming conduct. During the trial, twenty-seven men wearing white robes and hoods drove into town from the West, entered the church in a single file, and marched to the table where the presiding officer was sitting. Each of the white-robed intruders, without speaking, deposited a coin or a bill on the table. Before leaving the church, the leader of the group paused and announced solemnly, "In the name of justice." The men in white then got into their cars and drove out of town toward the West. Although the Klan was not known to exist in Linn County before this time, the members of the Methodist Church

<sup>15</sup> William G. Shepherd, "The Fiery Double Cross," *Collier's* XXII, No. 4 (July 28, 1928), pp. 8-9, 47.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Kirke Mechem, ed., *Annals of Kansas 1886-1825*, II (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1936), 303.

<sup>19</sup> Chalmers, pp. 143-44.

<sup>20</sup> Mechem, p. 318.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 322-23; *Emporia Gazette*, May 15, 1922, p. 1 and May 22, 1922, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Mechem, pp. 327, 328.

at Prescott clearly recognized the men in white as members of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>6</sup>

On October 15, 1922, Governor Allen sent Judge Mc Dermott to Liberty, a small town ten miles north of Coffeyville to investigate Klan threats against the mayor, Theodore Schierlman. He had refused to allow the Klan to use a building he owned for a meeting place. A group of masked men, believed to have been klansmen, seized Schierlman and horsewhipped him. At Coffeyville less than two weeks later, Governor Allen asserted in a speech that the Ku Klux Klan had "introduced into Kansas the greatest curse that comes to civilized people, the curse that rises out of unrestrained passions of men governed by religious intolerance and racial hatred." He promised that officers of the Klan would be expelled from the state.<sup>7</sup>

Less than a month after Governor Allen made his Coffeyville speech, ouster proceedings against the Ku Klux Klan were filed with the Kansas Supreme Court by the Attorney General on the grounds that the Klan was a Georgia corporation unauthorized to operate in Kansas.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of ouster proceedings against the Klan, more than 100 members of the Ku Klux Klan paraded at Douglass a short time later. The members were dressed in the full regalia of the order and wore masks, but no disturbances occurred.<sup>9</sup> It was clear that the Klan was becoming well established in southern Kansas, notwithstanding Governor Allen's efforts to exclude it from the state. He had good reason to oppose the Klan, for it had already entered the 1922 primaries.

Orin B. Strong, editor of *The Independent*, told of the Klan's efforts to defeat Phil Campbell, who had been involved in the "malicious persecution of the organization in the governmental probe and hearing before the House Investigating Committee."<sup>10</sup> As early as July 1922, Strong learned that the Ku Klux Klan had united with labor forces to defeat Campbell. Campbell was beaten, and on the day of the general election the efforts of the Invisible Empire were again evident. Strong was in Pittsburg discussing business with a banker when he learned of the Klan's victory in the general election. A big man, sweating freely, burst into the banker's office and cried, "H....., we're whipped—the Klan is casting its vote like a lead slug and it's hitting with a dull thud."<sup>11</sup>

In March 1923, H. H. Kitchen, organizer of the Ku Klux Klan in Topeka, was sentenced to the Shawnee County jail after he refused to divulge the names of Topeka klansmen. Kitchen told the commissioner of the Kansas Supreme Court, S. M. Brewster, that he had taken

<sup>6</sup> "Ku Klux Klan at Prescott," *La Cygne [Kansas] Journal*, October 13, 1922, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Mechem, pp. 329, 330.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330; see detailed discussion of the legal aspects in Sloan, *KHQ*, XL, 393-409.

<sup>9</sup> *La Cygne Journal*, October 6, 1922, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *The Independent*, January 9, 1925, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

the Klan oath which prohibited his naming the 140 Topekans who had signed the charter application. When he was asked if he thought that his oath was more binding than the oath he had given to the state as a witness or above his duties as a citizen of the United States, Kitchen replied that it was. He declared that the oath of a klansman "Taken before God" absolved him from his oath as a witness in court. Kitchen was then ordered back to jail on contempt charges. John S. Dean and W. L. Wood, attorneys for the Klan, pleaded futilely with the court for Kitchen's release on the grounds that the charges were unrelated to the ouster case which had been brought against the Klan.<sup>12</sup> On April 4, 1923, the attorneys for the Ku Klux Klan admitted that there were more than thirty Klans with thousands of members in the state.<sup>13</sup>

On April 30, 1923, the state began hearings on the activities of the Ku Klux Klan at Kansas City. S. M. Brewster, former attorney general, presided.<sup>14</sup> Because the state of Kansas was attempting to oust the Klan on the grounds that it was a foreign corporation, a new organization, the "Ku Klux Klan of Kansas," asked for a charter from the state charter board. The men who attempted to incorporate the order, J. C. Hopkins, L. F. Lutz, F. B. Crolle, Claude F. Higgins, and Harland A. Bullock, were all Kansas City, Kansas, men who had been members of the old Klan. They claimed to have retired from the Georgia organization in order to organize a new secret society in Wyandotte County in 1922.<sup>15</sup>

While the suit brought against the Klan in Kansas proceeded slowly, the Klan continued to add new members. The *Oswego Democrat* reported that it was no longer a secret that a Ku Klux Klan organization was being perfected in Oswego and the surrounding vicinity. Several preparatory meetings had been held with speakers making "One Hundred Per Cent American" speeches. The first indication that the Klan had been organized in Oswego came when a fiery cross appeared as a floral offering at the funeral of a well-known citizen of Oswego.<sup>16</sup>

In June, 400 members were initiated at one meeting in Wichita.<sup>17</sup> In the same month, the first meeting of the Ku Klux Klan was held in Drexel, Missouri, on the state line. A number of influential Drexel citizens were reported to be Klan members. At the same time, it became known that the Klan had been established at Cleveland, Missouri, another small town on the state line, and that several citizens of Louisburg, Kansas, had attended these meetings and were interested in organizing a Klan in their community.<sup>18</sup> In July, it came to public at-

<sup>12</sup> *La Cygne Journal*, March 9, 1923, p. 2; Mechem, pp. 354-55.

<sup>13</sup> Mechem, p. 357.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358.

<sup>15</sup> *La Cygne Journal*, May 11, 1923, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> "Here, There, and Everywhere," *The Louisburg Herald*, June 14, 1923, p. 2, quoted from the *Oswego Democrat*.

<sup>17</sup> Mechem, p. 360.

<sup>18</sup> *Louisburg Herald*, June 21, 1923, p. 2.



tention that the Klan was organized in Shawnee County.<sup>19</sup> The Klan held a huge celebration and barbecue in Pittsburg for members of the Invisible Empire, and members from over the state attended the meeting.<sup>20</sup> When the attorney general ruled that klansmen could not wear masks, 1,200 robed and hooded knights openly paraded Topeka's streets in defiance of the ruling.<sup>21</sup>

In order to bolster the Klan in Kansas, Hiram Wesley Evans, the Imperial Wizard, delivered a speech in Topeka on August 6. He declared that the Klan was not in politics, but that it "wants the right men in the right places."<sup>22</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Topeka Klan claimed 5,000 members, and a Ku Klux Klan wedding ceremony was performed near Chanute in an open-air auditorium with more than 3,500 hooded and robed klansmen present.<sup>23</sup>

In September 1923, the Klan began to issue *The Independent* at Mulberry. The paper's editor wrote:

The battle between the Ku Klux Klan and its enemies at Mulberry has now entered its second stage. The friends of the Klan have printed the first issue of their paper, *The Independent*. The editor of *The Independent* is Rev. E. H. Given. He extols the Ku Klux Klan and explains that Roman Catholicism and the liquor elements are the Klan's most bitter enemies.

Mulberry enjoys the distinction of being the only town in this part of the country where the friends of the Kluxers have started a paper. This has come about very largely perhaps, because the *News*, Editor Sears' paper, has not been much inclined to give the Kluxers a chance to put their side of the case before the community.<sup>24</sup>

Thereafter, *The Independent* carried Klan news. In February 1924, the paper began to arrive in the homes of subscribers under new ownership and management. Dr. J. F. Sandidge, head of the Klan at Mulberry, purchased the paper, and Orin B. Strong became the new publisher. Strong said later, "This newspaper is not an official organ of the Ku Klux Klan. We propagate the Klan message to the people of this county just as we would any other democratic set of aims and ideals."<sup>25</sup>

On Friday, September 28, 1923, *The Independent* described an initiation ceremony held in Pittsburg:

<sup>19</sup> Mechem, p. 362.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *La Cygne Journal*, September 14, 1923, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *The Independent*, September 28, 1923, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Editorial, *The Independent*, August 24, 1924, p. 1.

A class of 279 candidates was initiated into the county organization of the Ku Klux Klan at an open air ceremonial held at the fairgrounds Wednesday night. The candidates, more than 100 of them from Mulberry and vicinity, were taken into the mysteries of the order by the light of the large fiery cross of the order, which burned from the time the ceremonial started until the order ended its service for the night.

The Girard chapter of the order served the visiting Klansmen and the candidates with hot coffee and sandwiches, and cigars were much in evidence. The fairgrounds grandstand was seated with women members of the "Women of the Ku Klux Klan." They were invited to attend the ceremonial in a body. The initiation ceremonial was out of hearing distance of the visitors. The initiation was handled by the Pittsburg team.<sup>26</sup>

While the Ku Klux Klan appeared to be growing as fast as its organizers could initiate new members into the secret order, a small group of citizens in Crawford County met at Owl Hall in Mulberry for the purpose of forming a society to counter the activities of the Klan. The chief organizer was Millard F. Sears, editor of the *Mulberry News*. According to the *Fort Scott Bourbon News*, which Sears claimed was the only paper in southeastern Kansas besides *The Independent* which supported the Invisible Empire, the Loyal Constitutionalists were fighting a losing battle. The *Fort Scott Bourbon News* was quoted in the *Mulberry News*:

The *Mulberry News*, anti-Klan and the *Mulberry Independent*, pro-Klan, have been warring, relentlessly. The editor of the *News*, Mr. Sears, has in imitation of the Klan formed an organization of his own with a few dozen members. He calls them the Loyal Constitutionalists. Hugh Lardner and Henry Gott, local attorneys, have been speechmaking for the "Cons." The Kluxers import speakers. The Klux have about 600 members (too high by 400—Ed.) in Mulberry, and the "Cons" have about 150, it is reported to us. In each issue of the *News* the editor flays the Klan and praises the "Cons."<sup>27</sup>

Sears maintained that the Loyal Constitutionalists was a patriotic organization to oppose the "Cult that would bind this free land of ours with a philosophy which springs from greed, bigotry, and intolerance and tends to overthrow all that our forefathers had beneficently builded for us."<sup>28</sup>

The Mulberry, Kansas, chapter of the Loyal Constitutionalists adopted its constitution on August 24, 1923.<sup>29</sup> The October 12, 1923,

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, September 28, 1923, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Mulberry [Kansas] News*, November 30, 1923, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, October 12, 1923, p. 1.

issue of the *Mulberry News* published the "Purposes and Creed" of the Loyal Constitutionalists. The organization announced that it was a patriotic order for justice and all Constitutional rights.

The Klan *Independent* also told of the formation of the Loyal Constitutionalists. Under the headline "Anti-Klan Crowd Hold Meeting in Mulberry," the story read,

Extensive advertising of a meeting of an organization known as the Loyal Constitutionalists for Mulberry last Friday resulted in an audience estimated at 150 persons, but by actual count said to have numbered 86, gathering at Owl Hall for the purpose of hearing E. E. Haney, an attorney of Girard, condemn the Ku Klux Klan in no uncertain terms

Haney, who developed to be the principal speaker of the occasion devoted considerable eloquence to the fact that the Klan members were hooded and masked, in most of their public appearances and often referred to the Klan as an organization, of which its members wore "pillowslips" over their heads. The committee on arrangements, in its advance work apparently failed to properly instruct the "leading" members of the organization, on the proper time to applaud the speaker and he was often forced to bring about a rather prolonged pause in his talk, in order to give the chairman and other organizers an opportunity to start the tumult of enthusiasm.<sup>30</sup>

In the fall of 1923, Klan chapters were known to exist in many eastern Kansas communities, and where they did not exist, it was probably because the organizers were unable to be everywhere at once. In September, the Ku Klux Klan advertised openly in the local newspaper at Colony.<sup>31</sup> In Garnett, members of the Invisible Empire met at the Anderson County Courthouse and did not attempt to hide their identities.<sup>32</sup> It was reported in the Miami County *Osawatimie World* that the Klan was perfecting a ladies' auxiliary throughout the county.<sup>33</sup>

On February 29, 1924, *The Independent* announced that the Klan was making arrangements to purchase the fair grounds at Pittsburg with the idea of erecting a temple.<sup>34</sup> It is evident that the Klan was well established in Pittsburg by 1924. The fiery cross burned nightly and hooded, masked, and robed members of the Invisible Empire met regularly; but the Klan organizers still had many small eastern Kansas towns to bring into the Empire.

<sup>30</sup> *The Independent*, September 21, 1923, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Louisburg Herald*, September 27, 1923, p. 2, quoted from the *Le Roy Reporter*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, quoted from the *Ft. Scott Tribune*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, quoted from the *Osawatimie World*.

<sup>34</sup> *The Independent*, February 29, 1924, p. 1.

The first indication that the Klan had supporters at La Cygne in Linn County came when the *Kansas City Times* carried a news item on April 11, 1924, about a threat to a rural school teacher. In July of that year, the *La Cygne Journal* announced the official arrival of the Ku Klux Klan in a large advertisement that read, "Watch for the Fiery Cross. Don't fail to come to hear Rev. Floyd Evans, a national lecturer talk. Everyone invited to come. Watch for the fiery cross Wednesday night, July 9."<sup>35</sup>

A large crowd estimated at 1,500 persons attended the meeting at the city park in La Cygne on the night of July 9. Rev. Evans and Rev. Phillips, organizers of the order, made rousing speeches on Americanism, and after the open air general meeting was over, a closed meeting was held at the opera house where about forty members were taken into the secret society of the Invisible Empire. It was estimated that the Klan would have 200 members at La Cygne within a few weeks time.<sup>36</sup> On July 25, Rev. Cody, a national lecturer from Independence, Kansas, spoke before a large crowd at the La Cygne city park. After this meeting, the Klan intermittently published notices of special lodge meetings at La Cygne.<sup>37</sup>

During the last week of April, the Mulberry Klan entertained members of visiting Klans at the Miller brothers' property north of Mulberry. It was reported that 1,811 automobiles passed through the gate that led into a large pasture, and hundreds of others passed by the gate. A large cross, burning brightly, could be seen for miles. The American flag was raised high above the cross. Strong of *The Independent* described the meeting:

The Mulberry Klan, the largest in the county outside of Pittsburg, was out in full force. Girard, Liberal, Minden, Franklin, Frontenac, Lamar, Cherokee, and other points were represented well, while Pittsburg sent some hundreds of people, including the band, drill teams, and the chief executive of the central organization. A number of prominent men of the state in church and school affairs were present.

Robed Klansmen directed traffic on the streets of Mulberry and at the point of entrance to the grounds. The formation was circular inside the grounds. The first row of cars being more than a half mile in circumference and the second and third rows in proper position. The large crowd was handled without accident or an altercation. Klansmen with robes and crosses were welcomed in Mulberry by townspeople and occasional cheers could be heard as the streets were blocked by hundreds of cars.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, July 4, 1924, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, July 11, 1924, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, July 25, 1924, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, May 2, 1924, p. 1.



Shortly after the meeting at Mulberry, the first open-air Klan meeting at Fort Scott was held on Evergreen Cemetery Road property. The meeting proved to be a political gathering. A large crowd assembled before a 35-foot electric cross over which the American flag had been draped. After a short program, the president of Pittsburg Business College, Professor Errabo, introduced Mart Montee, the mayor of Pittsburg, who hoped to become a candidate for governor and was seeking the votes of klansmen. The main speaker of the evening was Dr. E. H. Given, pastor of the United Brethren Church at Pittsburg and Klan writer for *The Independent*. Given was campaigning for a seat in congress from the third district on the Citizen's ticket.

In July, Sears, editor of the *Mulberry News*, informed his readers that the Ku Klux Klan managers of the Citizen's ticket were Jonathan G. Miller, A. H. Carl, and Dan Wooley. Apparently these men needed no introduction to the residents of Mulberry and were well-known and influential members of the community.<sup>39</sup> The editor of *The Independent* described the Millers as "excessively rich."<sup>40</sup> These managers hoped to present an endorsed Klan slate of candidates to the voters in the general election in November.

On August 8, 1924, Sears admitted that the Klan had done much better in the primary election in Crawford County than he had expected. The main objective of the anti-Klan forces had been to keep the Klan from dominating the nominations on each ticket, but the election results showed that the Invisible Empire exercised considerable strength in both parties.<sup>41</sup>

The greatest victory for the Ku Klux Klan was the nomination of A. H. Carl for county attorney. "The results show that the Klan forces put forth their greatest efforts for this man," wrote Sears.<sup>42</sup> Charles Fowler was selected as the Democratic candidate for probate judge. His opponent in this race was M. F. Sears of the *Mulberry News*. Leonard Boyd led his opponent two to one for the nomination of county clerk, but Lance, who was bidding for the sheriff nomination, lost to Sheriff J. D. Turkington.<sup>43</sup>

One of the most interesting races in the 1924 election was for governor. Neither the Republican candidate, Ben Paulen, nor Democrat Jonathan Davis were members of the Klan. When Paulen denied that he was a member of the Klan, he always added "at this time." The Klan was thought to be responsible for Paulen's nomination in the primary, and according to David Chalmers, "It seemed, in the late summer of 1924, that the Klan was on the march in Kansas and nothing could stop it."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Mulberry News*, July 11, 1924, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *The Independent*, July 31, 1925, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Mulberry News*, August 8, 1924, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Chalmers, p. 145.

Fearing the great political influence being generated by the Klan, William Allen White, publisher of the *Emporia Gazette* and "Kansas keeper of the nation's conscience," entered as an independent candidate for governor. Although he did not expect to win, he conducted one of the most colorful campaigns that the state had ever seen. Determined to defeat the "organization of cowards," he set out with his wife and son in his Dodge touring car and covered the state, making delightfully original campaign speeches for six weeks. He would tell his listeners:

The gag rule first came into the Republican Party last May. A flock of dragons, Kleagles, Cyclops and Furies came up to Wichita from Oklahoma and called a meeting with some Kansas Terrors, Genii and Whangdoodles. A few weeks later, the Cyclops, Kleagles, Wizards, and Willopses-wallopuses began parading in the Kansas cow pastures, passing the word down to the shirt-tail rangers they were to go into the Kansas primaries and nominate Ben Paulen.<sup>45</sup>

The anti-Klan people loved this kind of talk from William Allen White, but Kansas klansmen at the national klonvokation in Kansas City, Missouri, carried a black coffin bearing the name of Charles B. Griffith, attorney general and a foe of the Klan, and led a goat labeled "William Allen White."<sup>46</sup> The editor of *The Independent* described White as "Bunkum Bill" and "sleek, fat, and imperialistic." Further, he was "a knocker, a kicker, and bushwhacker." Finally, he "represents the *Kansas City Star* in Kansas [which] is supporting the Klan-endorsed candidate in Missouri."<sup>47</sup>

In spite of White's attempt to kill the Klan with ridicule, and defeat candidates supported by it, Ben Paulen was elected governor of Kansas with 323,403 votes to Jonathan Davis's (Democrat) 182,861, and White's 149,811. White had achieved his purpose in dramatizing the grip the Klan had on politics in the state, however, and the dangers associated with the Klan's activities.<sup>48</sup> W. L. White, writing of his father's campaign, said that the support

had demonstrated to politicians that the Klan endorsement was, in fact, a handicap as there was in Kansas a larger anti-Klan vote than there were Klansmen. At all events, the Klan presently

<sup>45</sup> William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), p. 631; also see Robert W. Richmond, *Kansas: A Land of Contrasts* (St. Charles, Mo.: Forum Press, 1974), pp. 226-30, on the Klan and the election of 1924.

<sup>46</sup> Mechem, p. 389.

<sup>47</sup> *The Independent*, October 24, 1924, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> A. Bower Sageser, "Political Patterns of the 1920's," in John D. Bright, ed., *Kansas: The First Century*, II, 82. Also see "Klan Struck Powerful Blow in the State," *The Independent*, November 28, 1924, p. 1.

disappeared from Kansas politics; and on May 5, 1926, my father fired in the Gazette his parting shot:

"Doctor Hiram Evans, the Imperial Wizard of the Kluxers, is bringing his consecrated shirt tail to Kansas this spring

"He will see what was once a thriving and profitable hate factory and bigotorium now laughed into a busted community

"The Kluxers in Kansas are as dejected and sad as a last year's bird's nest, afflicted with general debility, dizziness on going upstairs, and general aversion to female society."<sup>49</sup>

The re-election in 1924 of C. B. Griffith as attorney general was of great importance, for he was investigating the Klan and had been instrumental in attempting to oust the organization from the state.

Prior to the election, in October 1924, Charles H. McBrayer, Grand Dragon of the realm of Kansas, published the Klan's stand on the ouster suit in newspapers throughout Kansas. Addressed to "All Hydras, Great Titans, Furies, Giants, Exalted Cyclops, Terrors, and Klansmen," the letter was a defense of the Klan and an appeal for justice and fair treatment. It was an important piece of Klan propaganda. McBrayer reviewed the history of the ouster suit brought against the Klan and stated the charges against the Klan were contained in two counts. The first charge brought was that the Klan was operating in Kansas without a charter. The second charge was that the Klan was "a criminal organization, violating every law known to God and man, and many of them enumerated."<sup>50</sup>

Sardius M. Brewster had been appointed as commissioner by the Kansas supreme court to hear testimony on the two counts contained in the official ouster petition filed on November 21, 1922. Commissioner Brewster's report stated that on the second count, "It was not enough for the state to show isolated cases of misconduct. It was necessary to show that such misconduct was carried on under the authority or direction of the defendant corporation." There was insufficient evidence to prove that the Klan as an organization had coerced citizens, although individual Klansmen were guilty in certain instances.<sup>51</sup>

The first charge that the Klan was engaging in business in Kansas without a charter brought agreement from Commissioner Brewster. It was operating as a foreign corporation under a charter granted by the state of Georgia.<sup>52</sup>

In January the supreme court accepted Commissioner Brewster's findings, and said that the Klan would have to seek a charter from the state charter board.<sup>53</sup> The Klan interpreted the court's decision as a

<sup>49</sup> White, *Autobiography*, pp. 631-32.

<sup>50</sup> *La Cygne Journal*, October 31, 1924, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Sloan, *KHQ*, XL, 399; Robert Richmond comments (p. 228), "However, the prosecutors and the courts had trouble keeping witnesses who were willing to testify against the Klan because of threats and pressures."

<sup>52</sup> Sloan, *KHQ*, XL, 399.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, XL, 400-01.

victory, but the press saw the decision as the first step in ousting the society from the state. The Klan had been charged "with many outrages," Strong wrote in *The Independent*, but had been completely exonerated. "Of course," he stressed, "the Kansas Klan will ignore the Kansas supreme court decision and go right on and do business."<sup>54</sup>

An attempt to get the state legislature to compel the charter board to act favorably in behalf of the Klan narrowly failed. Then, an appeal was filed in the United States supreme court. Later, in February 1927, this appeal was refused.<sup>55</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan applied for a Kansas charter May 25, 1925. G. Clay Baker, state senator from Shawnee County, filed the application with the charter board. The board had previously refused to grant the charter to the Independent Klan of America and a local Klan in Wyandotte County, but the new application was made on the regular form prescribed for foreign corporations desiring admission to Kansas. The purpose of the corporation was listed as follows:

Nothing except such as is incidental to the carrying out of its purposes as a mystic, social, patriotic, benevolent association, the conferring of initiation and degree rituals, fraternal and secret obligations, words, grips, signs, and ceremonies, and the promotion and establishment of subordinate organizations in accordance with the provision in its charter.<sup>56</sup>

The charter board rejected the Klan's application in June, because there were no provisions in Kansas statutes for "mystic" corporations. Later, the Klan filed a petition for approval as a "fraternal" organization, and on July 1 the charter board rejected it.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, Klansmen met openly throughout Kansas without fear of arrest. A meeting of the Klan at Girard gained such a large attendance that many klansmen left without hearing the speakers because they could not find standing room in the theatre in that county seat town. Strong observed that 1,500 klansmen at one meeting was a large gathering for an organization which the press claimed had been "ousted from the state."<sup>58</sup>

By 1925, the Crawford County Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Kansas Realm, Number 22, boasted that it had the largest membership in the history of the organization. The klavern had been moved from the fair grounds to North Broadway in Pittsburg.<sup>59</sup>

By 1926, the Headlight faction, which appears to have been a radical group of lecturers and writers who created divisions in the local

<sup>54</sup> *The Independent*, January 15, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Sloan, *KHQ*, XL, 404-05.

<sup>56</sup> *The Independent*, June 5, 1925, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Sloan, *KHQ*, XL, 404.

<sup>58</sup> *The Independent*, February 13, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, January 9, 1925, p. 2.



Klans, had been forced to leave the Klan at Pittsburg. Strong observed, "During the three years of life in this county, the organization has faced many tricky issues. It has been compelled to take drastic measures when internal dissension threatened." He said that members had become more independent and no longer tended to vote in blocs but voted as they pleased and endorsed whom they considered to be "clean government candidates," whether they were members of the Klan or not. "Headlight speechmakers are not inside to make revolutionary utterances, or to promote private wars of their own," he concluded.<sup>60</sup>

The fiery cross continued to burn nightly at the baseball park in Pittsburg in spite of the fact that some businessmen believed that business would have been better if it had been removed. To strangers, the burning cross was a novelty. Klansmen in Crawford County explained that they just liked to see the emblem of their order displayed as a form of friendly greeting.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, by 1926, the Klan was in retreat in Kansas. It began to take on the look of other fraternal orders of the day, adopting a policy of cooperation in public improvement projects, and professing abandonment of its earlier hatreds. The Invisible Empire, it seemed, was seeking acceptance as a social organization.

The Klan in Kansas, and elsewhere, had a momentary rejuvenation with the nomination of Al Smith for the presidency in 1928. Although disapproving of Herbert Hoover's internationalism, at least he was a Protestant and safely dry, rather than a Catholic and the hero of the Eastern big cities. Even William Allen White, unyielding foe of the Klan, described Smith as a representative of the saloon and gambling interests and feared that he would, if elected, nullify the Eighteenth Amendment by some "legal trick."<sup>62</sup> Hiram Wesley Evans, speaking with the Klan's authoritative voice, explained that the Klan would oppose Smith because he was "inextricably allied with bossism, with nullification, with alienism, with priest-rule."<sup>63</sup>

David M. Chalmers sums up the election of Herbert Hoover, "In the end, the old-stock native America and prosperity were too much for the Irish boy from the Lower East Side. In 1928, probably no Democrat could have won. However, the Klan did not deserve any important share of the credit other than having helped condition the American people to such campaigns."<sup>64</sup>

There is no definite date for the death of the Invisible Empire in eastern Kansas. After the election of Hoover, the Klan simply continued to fade more and more from the public view. By the depression years,

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, March 26, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Matthew and Hannah Josephson, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), p. 382.

<sup>63</sup> "The Ballots Behind the Ku Klux Klan," *The World's Work*, LV, No. 3 (January 28, 1924), 252.

<sup>64</sup> Chalmers, p. 303.

it had all but ceased to exist. Horn wrote of the original Klan, "It was; then it was not — no man could say when the one condition ended and the other began."<sup>65</sup> The Kansas Klan of the 1920's, too, "was; and then it was not."

### III

Fanaticism and fear contributed to the Ku Klux Klan movement in eastern Kansas during the 1920's. Many Americans were disillusioned and had a deep sense of insecurity during the period following World War I. This led many leading small town citizens to the organization which appeared to preserve the status quo. Many persons who did not join the movement shared the same insecurities, but they were not "joiners" and did not wish to be identified with the radical Klan organization. Some simply did not hold the fears of their neighbors and refused to hide behind sheets and pillowslips.<sup>1</sup>

Causes of fear in the Kansas citizenry during the 1920's are illustrated in contemporary Klan literature. Klan writings seldom indicate that the Negro was a cause of insecurity. Most small towns had "Jim Crow" laws, and Negroes knew that they did not dare stay there overnight. Negroes who lived in the towns of eastern Kansas were spoken of as "our colored" and they "knew their places." Thus, the old fear of miscegenation and Negro rule that had prompted the establishment of the original Ku Klux Klan was not prominent.

There were, however, deep-rooted fears and insecurities among Kansans, as elsewhere in the United States, and the Klan gave priority to those related to Catholicism, prohibition, and immorality. There were also hints in Klan literature of fears of communism, immigrants, labor organizations, Jews, and corrupt government.

Although most Klan writers began by saying that they were not anti-Catholic, they ended by condemning the Roman Catholic Church as representing the greatest single threat to Anglo-Saxon-Protestant values. There were those Protestant ministers who for years had linked the anti-Christ and the Beast of the book of *Revelation* with the Catholic Church and the Pope. It took little persuasion on the part of Klan writers to convince Protestants of all denominations that the last days had arrived and that the Pope could overthrow the government of the United States as easily as the Communists had seized Russia.

Even those klansmen who did not view the Catholic Church as a major threat believed that Catholics owed their first allegiance to a foreign power; therefore, Catholics could not be "100 per cent" loyal

<sup>65</sup> Horn, p. 373.

<sup>1</sup> Personal Interview, September 19, 1969.

fact no more tangible than the lurking presence of the Bogey Man."<sup>12</sup> He ridiculed the idea that the Pope was going to move his headquarters to Washington within six months as the Klan organizers were warning the residents of Mulberry in 1923. Sears wrote, "it is time for every newspaper in the land, big and little, to get busy and tear the mask from the faces of these migratory marplots."<sup>13</sup>

Not all of the Ku Klux Klan members in eastern Kansas waged a bitter "hate campaign" against Catholics. In September 1923, the Knights of Columbus and the knights of the Ku Klux Klan at Colony advertised a benefit ball game to be held to aid the Jewish relief fund.<sup>14</sup> In Garnett, members of the Invisible Empire and members of the Catholic Church met at the Anderson County Courthouse in order to adopt a set of resolutions to help preserve peace and harmony in the community. Both sides denounced the radicals who had invaded their community and had stirred up strife and hatred among peaceful neighbors.<sup>15</sup>

By 1925, the tone of the Klan articles had begun to soften toward the Catholic Church, and writers sometimes admitted that perhaps the Klan had been a bit bigoted in the beginning. The Crawford County Klan newspaper reflected:

The Klan, in this county, has gradually assumed an air of permanency. There is no particular fight left here. Today the Klan in this county is as conservative as the other Protestant fraternal organizations. Credulous Klansmen now know that there are no guns stored in the basements of the Catholic churches, and credulous Catholic mothers know that their children will not be kidnapped by hooded Knights after nightfall.<sup>16</sup>

In 1926, the same source reported on the organization's increased tolerance, "Catholics are not being denounced by Headlight henchmen as 'Red necks' and 'Fish-eaters.' It is a very much improved condition."<sup>17</sup>

Coupled with the idea that Catholics were less than one hundred per cent American was the idea that patriotism was limited to white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon citizens of the United States. Thus, an exaggerated sense of patriotism permeated all Klan literature. A writer for the Klan organ at Mulberry wrote in May of 1924, "Is it wrong to awaken patriotism and Christianity in the hearts of men?"<sup>18</sup> Another writer stated:

<sup>12</sup> *Mulberry News*, August 23, 1923, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> "Here There and Everywhere," *The Louisburg Herald*, September 27, 1923, p. 2, quoted from *Le Roy Reporter*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, quoted from the *Ft. Scott Tribune*.

<sup>16</sup> *The Independent*, December 11, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, February 12, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, May 2, 1924, p. 1.

The Klan teaches that the rights of American citizenship should be exercised to the fullest degree by all loyal Americans so that foreign and un-American influences shall not control the destinies and sap the loyalty of this nation.<sup>19</sup>

The importance of patriotism in the Invisible Empire cannot be overlooked in a study of the Ku Klux Klan in eastern Kansas. The rituals of the Klan were steeped in patriotic display. The following editorial illustrates the influence of patriotic rites. The story was called "The Lesson."

And sometimes we wonder why Americans — real Americans oppose the lesson of the Ku Klux Klan.

Not long since we saw 5,000 men in full regalia. Twenty bands were playing "The Star Spangled Banner." The military step was perfect. Each step was in unison. Every robe was snow white, with red dash, made by the insignia of the order and of democracy, setting off the intense white. On every side were silk flags — large ones, the American flag.

In the lead of this parade were 300 horsemen, all mounted on grey or dapple grey horses. The bridle reins were decorated with little flags. Every tenth rider carried a large American flag.

Every 100th man carried a miniature fiery cross. Gigantic spot lights played over the scene.

At the end of the street was a large flag pole, the upper end of which was more than 100 feet in the air. From this was suspended an American flag of 30X40 feet in dimensions. Upon this flag a dozen spot lights were playing. As the parade neared the flag a dozen buglers stepped into the light. They were costumed in white garments. Their military bugle call rose shrilly over the softer "Onward Christian Soldiers" of the leading band. A space was cleared as if by magic in front of the flag and two hundred men arranged themselves in a formation spelling out the words — "Americans on guard." It was an inspiring sight.

"Is there a man with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said, This is mine own, my native land?"

What a lesson in patriotism this! There were no scoffers there.<sup>20</sup>

The professed patriotic spirit of the Klan during the 1920's was not a new element in eastern Kansas. During the months prior to the entry of the United States in World War I, lecturers made "one hundred per cent American" speeches in theatres and opera houses throughout the Midwest. One advertisement stated in part, "This will be a rousing

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, September 28, 1923, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, October 24, 1924, p. 2.



patriotic meeting and every liberty loving person with a drop of American blood in his veins should be present."<sup>21</sup>

When the United States entered the war in 1917, Red Cross centers sprang up in every small town and community. Fraternal orders were extremely patriotic. Those who did not support the war whole-heartedly were considered less than 100 per cent American. Young men who did not readily volunteer for service were called "Yellow Streaks," and although there was frequent talk of "tar and feathers" there is no evidence that the threat was actually carried out.<sup>22</sup>

The telephone operators of a local company repeatedly warned a physician against the use of the German language over the telephone, and when he objected to the draft and the sending of American soldiers to France, he was branded a "German spy" and received so much abuse that he was finally compelled to publish a rebuttal in the local paper.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, when E. H. Given described the qualifications for Klan membership in 1923, they were not new to small townspeople. Rev. Given wrote:

Every man of the order takes his stand upon the highest ideals for the purest type of American patriotism.

They stand upon the Declaration of Independence as the basis of all popular government.

We stand for the American flag. We have but one flag, and it calls to the nations of the world, "Don't tread on me." The price of the flag was the blood of our fathers.

To those who would undermine the free institutions we say "Hands off," and we will defend the free institutions against every foe, whether it be political or ecclesiastical.<sup>24</sup>

Prohibition appealed to klansmen, would-be klansmen, and non-klansmen alike. David M. Chalmers in *Hooded Americanism* said, "Although vice was always a matter of interest, the bond which united Klansman and churchman was a common struggle against demon rum and its minions."<sup>25</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in eastern Kansas.

Throughout Kansas, the W.C.T.U. sought an end to "this great evil—the liquor traffic."<sup>26</sup> Sermons were preached against the sale of alcoholic beverages, prohibitionists found many willing disciples in the war against the wet forces.

The story is told of a woman living in a tent in Miami County who went to the Justice of the Peace in Sugarcreek township. She said her

<sup>21</sup> *Drexel Star*, November 29, 1917, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Personal Interview, September 1, 1969.

<sup>23</sup> *Drexel Star*, December 16, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *The Independent*, September 7, 1923.

<sup>25</sup> Chalmers, p. 248.

<sup>26</sup> *Drexel Star*, November 15, 1917, p. 1.

son had become intoxicated by drinking liquor at a "blind tiger" operated in Drexel. Mr. J. H. Rhea, Justice of the Peace, told her that he had no jurisdiction in Missouri and for her to see a Missouri officer. She told him that she could get no satisfaction from the Missouri officials because she did not have sufficient evidence. Shortly after the woman's complaints had been registered, however, the "joint" was visited by persons wearing white robes and white hoods pulled down over their faces. They proceeded to empty the contents from the owner's bottles, then took the operator of the tavern to the edge of town where he was warned to leave town and never to come back. No one knew who the white-robed men were, but the incident went down in the memory of those who remembered the incident as the work of the "white-cappers."<sup>27</sup>

Most small town officials in Kansas shared the sentiments of the Mayor of Drexel. When he learned that there had been strangers in town who had been drinking and had become intoxicated on a Saturday night, he inserted a notice in the *Drexel Star* which threatened: "Drexel will not tolerate any such performances. This is a prohibition town. Bootleggers should keep away if they don't want to get what is coming to them."<sup>28</sup>

Upon its organization in Kansas, the Ku Klux Klan took up the fight against the "liquor traffic." Bootlegging had existed for years in Crawford County with general agreement that there was one source of supply, and "drunk after drunk and bootlegger after bootlegger" who appeared in the local police courts agreed that it was available "in Croweburg or a dozen other places" to the south of Pittsburg.<sup>29</sup> *The Independent* claimed that the "booze ring" received protection through the influence of men of means and dignity "who handled things, but never appeared in public with dirty hands."<sup>30</sup>

In 1925 a number of raids on a bootlegging ring in Pittsburg were conducted by members of the Klan. During the first ten days of the "clean-up" in Crawford County by the Ku Kluxers 4,700 gallons of "moonshine" were confiscated. This was in addition to thousands of gallons of "wine, hootch, and other stuff taken."<sup>31</sup> Wrote a klansman, "Naturally the bootlegger and other law violaters have no love for the Klan."<sup>32</sup>

Even those who did not endorse the Ku Klux Klan in Crawford County had to admit that the Kluxers had done what the anti-Klan forces and individuals had not been able to do for years—rid the county of the liquor industry. Through the help of Klan-elected county attorney, Heth Carl, and the efforts of the Invisible Empire, the sale

<sup>27</sup> George Rhea, "History of Drexel," *Drexel Star*, November 12, 1953, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Drexel Star*, April 13, 1922, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> *The Independent*, March 20, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, February 13, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, April 13, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, March 30, 1925, p. 1.

of liquor was stopped not only in Crawford County, but to some extent in every neighboring county.

An editorial in *The New Republic* explained why some people joined the Ku Klux Klan. It was a parochial-mindedness causing them to long for the clock's return to Victorian time in order to preserve the status quo which seemed so much in danger. Threatening the old ways were the wildness of youth, the bootlegger, all night auto escapades, petting parties, and bad gin. People, especially those in the Middle West said some observers, were frightened by the rapid changes taking place in society.<sup>33</sup>

Even that old enemy of the Klan, William Allen White, sensed that the era was becoming morally corrupt.

And where, in these glittering twenties, were the hopes which I and my kind had held so high in the first two decades of the new century? Looking around me in the gathering roar of prosperity, the the only rising political force seemed to be the dark bigotry of the Ku Klux Klan. And other sinister forces of oppression to the free human spirit seemed to be gathering across the seas. Where were our hopes and dreams of yesteryear?

What a sordid decade is passing! It will be known in American history fifty years hence as the time of terrible reaction

Corruption is rampant in high places. Special privilege is unleashed and shameless.<sup>34</sup>

There is little doubt that the Klan appealed to many decent small townspeople who wanted to curb the excesses that seemed to threaten their way of life. When the Klan attacked the local undesirables in the tradition of the old vigilante law and order style of earlier days, the Invisible Empire was awarded a badge of respectability.

When a married man of Drexel began to have an affair with "another woman," the Ku Klux Klan advised the man — in a note — to break off the affair at once or suffer the consequences. The man heeded the advice of the Invisible Empire.<sup>35</sup> According to C. W. Mills, who corresponded with the editor of the *Drexel Star* about the Klan, a signed letter advising the person to conduct himself properly was usually sufficient notice.<sup>36</sup>

The Invisible Empire, then, became the keeper of community morals. When anyone not in the Klan stepped out of line, the Klan was there to remind him that his conduct was undesirable. If that failed to change the violator's conduct, the Klan used more forceful

<sup>33</sup> "The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan," *The New Republic*, LII, No. 678 November 30, 1927), 34.

<sup>34</sup> White, *Autobiography*, pp. 627, 632.

<sup>35</sup> Personal Interview, September 9, 1969.

<sup>36</sup> Letter to the Editor, *Drexel Star*, October 13, 1925, p. 1.

means. There is little evidence in the local newspapers of eastern Kansas to indicate that the Klan often had to resort to harsh measures. The war against the Catholic Church was carried on from the pulpit of protestant churches or from the speaker's platform. The battle against immorality was usually conducted subtly. Only against "booze" did the Klan move forcefully from the very first. For the most part there seemed to be a desire on the part of small townspeople to form a society in which they could verbalize their fears and express their love of God and country.

The Klan, of course, was not the only watcher of the morals of the community. The pastor of the Methodist Church at Louisburg, Kansas, called attention to the fact that many in the church were becoming involved in harmful amusements:

For the benefit of some who have been misled by newspaper reports, I call attention to paragraph 69 of the Discipline, which reads as follows: We look with deep concern on the great prevalence of harmful amusements, and lift up a solemn note of warning, particularly against attending upon immoral, questionable, and misleading theatrical motion picture performances; against dancing, and against such games of chance as are frequently associated with gambling.

No, Methodist, the ban is not lifted on dancing, neither sin of any other form. We boldly assert, as Methodists, that we are more than ever opposed to taking diversions as cannot be used in the name of Lord Jesus Christ in the ballroom or any other sin of diversion, at the same time claim to be a follower of the gentle Man of Galilee.<sup>37</sup>

Klansmen were urged to be on guard at all times against the evils in society. They were advised by lecturers and writers that there was not a local organization in the United States which should sit by idly with the excuse that there was nothing to do. Perhaps the Klan did become the huge secret service organization that Simmons planned, for one Klan writer said, "Many a bootlegger and illicit narcotic dealer, many a trafficker in the shame of womanhood, many a vagrant, loafer, and thief has met his downfall directly owing to information lodged with the proper authorities."<sup>38</sup> The Invisible Empire working with law enforcement bodies was confirmed in *The Independent*, "The Klan is also a civic asset in the cause of law enforcement. Klansmen are sworn not only to obey the law themselves, but also to aid the constituted authorities in enforcing them."<sup>39</sup>

One of the first examples of the Invisible Empire's efforts to clean up a community's morals was in Shawnee County where the Klan

<sup>37</sup> *Louisburg Herald*, July 3, 1924, P. 1.

<sup>38</sup> *The Independent*, September 28, 1923, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



started a campaign to "clear the highway of spooners" in July of 1923.<sup>40</sup> In November 1924, the Pittsburg Chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, including the Women of the Klan, resolved that public dance resorts operating for profit should be closed. A reporter for *The Independent* wrote:

Booze, youth, and ignorance have played a large part in making profitable these debasing episodes. In this community most of the cases of assault between the sexes have followed dances where they got the inspiration for rash and immoral acts. Like the saloon keepers the dance managers have paid no heed to public sentiment.

Every few days some rotten scandal of lost youth and blasted life comes to the surface. To capitalize the weaknesses and the follies of youth for money is what the K.K.K. and other organizations are trying to break up.<sup>41</sup>

Intense nationalism encouraged Americans to avoid all European complications. A flood of immigrants whose ways were alien to klansmen and the bolsheviks associated with the "Red Scare" were threats to the social order that the Invisible Empire was struggling to preserve. Warnings, too, came about the dangers of an influx of starving Europeans who could affect the economy.<sup>42</sup>

There is little in Kansas Klan literature, however, to suggest that communism was regarded as a primary threat to society. Robert Murray indicated that there were only a few raids on Reds in the Midwest and "Only in Kansas City was there much activity."<sup>43</sup> Chalmers pointed out that the Ku Klux Klan discovered communism in the 1930's, but by that time the Klan had ceased to be an influential force in eastern Kansas.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the fear of communism was not too significant in causing men in small Kansas towns to join the Klan.

The Ku Klux Klan was strongly anti-immigrant. The attitude of the Klan Wizard, Hiram Wesley Evans, toward immigration was expressed in *The Independent*. The Wizard stated:

A large number among the vast hordes of immigrants who have reached our shores in the last thirty years have been Catholics. Another larger percentage of this horde have been Jews. In Protestant America we must have time to teach these alien people the fundamental principles of human liberty before we permit further masses

<sup>40</sup> Mechem, p. 382.

<sup>41</sup> *The Independent*, November 12, 1924, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Arthur Corning White, "An American Fascismo," *Forum*, LXXII, No. 5 (November 1924), 636-638.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), p. 217.

<sup>44</sup> Chalmers, p. 5.

of ignorant, superstitious, religious, devotees to come within our borders.

From every angle our country and its institutions are in danger, and no danger is greater or more destructive than the infiltration of peoples and ideas which are not American.<sup>45</sup>

A week later, his opinions on the subject again appeared:

three millions and more have come—quite enough for today and for fifty years beyond. Until these millions are distributed, Poland, Roumania, and Russia must find other ports of entry for their semitic subjects. The native-born, white Protestant Christian American has all the foreign population of Europe and of Asia that he can digest or assimilate, or even entertain.<sup>46</sup>

It is difficult to assess a direct, unanimous pro- or anti-labor stance for the Kansas Ku Klux Klan. Many members of the Invisible Empire tended to agree with the rural Kansas view that strikes and labor quarrels were the products of foreign agitators. Nevertheless, the Klan got supporters among striking railroad workers, especially in the Arkansas City area, when black workers did not join the strike in 1922. Organized labor did not like Governor Henry J. Allen, the proponent of the unique Industrial Court; Allen was an opponent of the Klan; some workers supported the Klan because of Allen's opposition. On the other hand, a close ally of the Klan was the Associate Industries, representing such major corporations as the packers and railroads, through John S. Dean, Topeka attorney, who served as counsel for both groups. This "association actively fought labor and opposed such shocking notions as factory inspection and the minimum wage."<sup>47</sup> Still, it is true that the labor vote joined the Klan vote in gaining a number of offices for candidates endorsed by Ku Klux Klan. Robert W. Richmond renders the basic judgment, "Organized labor as a whole was not solidly behind the KKK."<sup>48</sup>

Why did Kansans become members of the Invisible Empire? Was it strictly out of fear and insecurity or were there other factors causing the ranks to fill so rapidly? According to Stanley Frost, the Klan was expedient. It used bootlegging, high railroad rates, or the latest local scandal to further its cause. The Klan both reflected and exploited unrest and dissatisfaction with "the high cost of living, social injustice and inequality, mal-administration of justice, political corruption, hyphenism,

<sup>45</sup> *The Independent*, December 28, 1923, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, January 4, 1924, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Chalmers, p. 145.

<sup>48</sup> Richmond, p. 228; also see Francis W. Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil, 1930-1936* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1969), pp. 11-12, 14, 18, and Sloan, *KKK*, XL, 393-96.

disunity, unassimilated and conflicting ideals and standards." Klan strength existed "because it offers what no one else has offered: a solution which, whether right or not, is fundamental and all-embracing in that it calls for a return to a time-honored standard."<sup>49</sup>

The growth of fundamentalism in protestant America also played an important role in the Invisible Empire. Fundamentalism challenged the new developments and sought to entrench traditional doctrines and practices. It was at times a bitter and divisive movement which was often militant. Its leaders were charged with stirring up conflict as much for the love of a fight as for love of truth. The movement tended to identify Christianity with patriotism and was influenced by the stream of superpatriotism which marked the 1920's. One fundamentalist leader preached "100 per cent Americanism" and said patriotism and Christianity are synonymous terms just as hell and traitors are synonymous. Although fundamentalism declined rapidly after 1925, its influence continued in certain congregations and small denominations. Many who agreed essentially with its doctrines turned away because they did not want to be associated with its spirit of bitterness and strife. It is not difficult to see the parallels between this movement in protestant churches and the Ku Klux Klan. Like the Ku Klux Klan, fundamentalism introduced harmful tensions into the churches which offset its worthwhile contributions.<sup>50</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan, then, can be viewed as an inevitable product of the 1920's. Fear and insecurity led many Kansans into the Invisible Empire, but all of those who became members of the secret order in eastern Kansas were not revolutionaries or simply chronic malcontents. Many represented honest laborers and small town businessmen — bankers, ministers, publishers of small town weeklies, lawyers, doctors, and merchants. Insecure in the present and apprehensive about the future, they turned against those things which they saw as threatening and alien to them. When the enemies failed to materialize or were eliminated, the knights no longer had anything to fear and their crusade collapsed.

#### IV

Conditions of the past also contributed to the spectacular success of the Ku Klux Klan in eastern Kansas during the 1920's. From its earliest days Kansas produced an environment in which secret societies could thrive. There is a record filled with fear, intrigue, vigilance, and the

<sup>49</sup> Stanley Frost, *The Challenge of the Klan* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1924), pp. 170-71.

<sup>50</sup> H. Leon McBeth, "The Fundamentalist Movement," *Source: Church Training*, H No. 2 (January, February, March, 1972), 38-40.

formation of secret orders to protect life and property. The Ku Klux Klan furnished a last link in a long line of secret organizations that existed in Kansas from territorial days.

Many of the first residents in the area were single men from Missouri. They formed roving bands called "posses," and they interviewed all newcomers, telling them that death was all that was in store for those who opposed the pro-slavery faction. "Without even the shadow of authority, life was taken and property confiscated by the antagonistic element. The social and political system was unique and peculiar to the country."<sup>1</sup>

Secret Indian treaties made in Washington D. C. were made known to these pro-slavery people through secret organizations. They learned which lands would be thrown open for settlement; moreover, it was desirable that this information reach only those who would strengthen the pro-slavery cause. Naturally, this valuable information was closely guarded so that free-state men did not settle on newly-opened lands.<sup>2</sup>

Free-state people had to organize to protect themselves from pro-slavery forces. Secret anti-slavery organizations, which were formed along the border, were known as "Jayhawkers," "Wideawakes," "Red-legs," and perhaps by other names locally. Jayhawkers in Linn County "cleaned up" Linn County and made it safe for anti-slavery people to settle there.<sup>3</sup> The Wideawakes was organized in other northern states and spread to Kansas where it probably absorbed nearly every free-state man in the territory. The Kansas Redlegs was an independent secret military order organized for "desperate service along the Border."<sup>4</sup>

Wayne Gard has stated:

Kansas, born in violence, had vigilance groups almost from its start. These stern plainsmen rid many communities of horse thieves and desperados. As elsewhere, the secret bodies sometimes degenerated into mob rule or were used for private vengeance. But usually they were made up of law-abiding, responsible citizens who wanted only to maintain order and to protect lives and property. Most of them were formed only as occasion arose and were disbanded as soon as their task was done.<sup>5</sup>

The basic principle of the Ku Klux Klan was the same as that of the vigilantes in that it was extra-judicial. The organization was not a court, heard no evidence, but dispensed justice on the spot without answering to any higher authority.

<sup>1</sup> William Ansel Mitchell, *Linn County, Kansas — A History* (Kansas City: Campbell-Gates, 1928), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>4</sup> William Elsey Connelley, *William Quantrill and the Border Wars* (New York: Pageant Book, 1956), pp. 411-17.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Gard, *Frontier Justice* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), p. 195.



William Starr Myers believed that the Ku Klux Klan was an extension of older orders. He saw it as a continuation of the "Know Nothing" movement of the 1850's, which opposed the naturalization of foreign-born immigrants and the Roman Catholic Church. It used the secret grip and signs, passwords, and strange rituals. The Know Nothing Society professed the highest type of American patriotism, yet its un-American radical acts, religious prejudices, and racial hatreds sowed the seeds of its own failure.<sup>8</sup> Other writers in the 1920's found similarities between the Ku Klux Klan and the Know Nothing movement of the 1850's. R. A. Patton said that the selling points of both groups were the same.<sup>9</sup> Noel P. Gist later found the same comparison in his thorough study about secret societies.<sup>10</sup>

Another wave of extremism spread over the country in 1882 with a third peak of immigration. As a result, the American Protective Association was organized in 1887 along the same lines as the Know Nothing order. It found many converts in the Midwest and formed yet another connecting link between the early secret societies and the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920's. It endorsed nativism, opposed the Catholic Church and Catholic immigration, and was especially strong in Kansas.<sup>11</sup>

Only Catholics were excluded from the American Protective Association. The only requirement for admission was that the members owe their primary allegiance to the Constitution of the United States, but members interpreted this requirement to exclude Roman Catholics. The society was nonsectarian and considered the public school the bulwark of American society. The order favored stricter immigration laws and was against the enlistment of non-citizens in the armed forces of the United States.<sup>12</sup>

One of the strongest and most popular of the secret orders in eastern Kansas was the Anti-Horse Thief Association. By 1862, horse stealing had become so common in eastern Kansas that it was necessary for the citizens to band together in order to protect their property. At a meeting of citizens at the home of H. D. Ward, a mile northeast of La Cygne, eighty men were enrolled in the organization to detect and imprison horse thieves. This was probably one of the first meetings to form the lodge which became the state-wide secret order known as the Anti-Horse Thief Association.<sup>13</sup> This organization was still in existence in eastern Kansas in the 1920's. It probably had the longest life of any

of the secret Kansas societies which came into existence during or shortly after the Civil War.

In the 1920's the Anti-Horse Thief Association was a secret order which held annual conventions, participated in local affairs, and apprehended those charged as thieves. A horse thief was seldom arrested, but thieves were frequently caught stealing harness or chickens. For the most part, however, the members simply got together regularly to enjoy wolf drives, oyster suppers, and picnics with their friends and families. The New Lancaster lodge in Miami County and the lodge at Washington School in Sugar Creek Township often held joint meetings. At La Cygne the Anti-Horse Thief Association held a Street Fair annually, and still practiced its original function as late as the 1920's. On October 27, 1922, the following article appeared in the *La Cygne Journal*:

Charlie White, who entered a plea of guilty on the charge of harness stealing in the district court last week and was sentenced to serve a term in the penitentiary, owes his capture and conviction largely to the efforts of the La Cygne A. H. T. A. lodge which was on the lookout for him from the time it received word of his theft of harness at Spring Hill the week before he repeated the offense at Mound City.<sup>14</sup>

Most members of the Anti-Horse Thief Association were farmers. Nearly every farmer in the Washington community in Miami County was a member of the lodge and if suspicious strangers lingered too long in the community, their actions were reported to the members. The members were armed in order to arrest thieves. One member of the Sugar Creek Township order claimed that his old-time six-shooter would "shoot six times and throw rocks for ten more rounds."<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the secret vigilante-type of organizations in eastern Kansas, there were many old, respected fraternal orders. By the 1920's, when the Klan appeared in eastern Kansas, the social life of each small community was thoroughly organized. The Masons probably made up the largest fraternal brotherhood, but the Odd Fellows, the Modern Woodmen, and the Knights of Pythias were just as active and claimed large memberships.

Members of the secret orders were the leaders in the small communities in the 1920's. Businessmen and churchmen, especially, were joiners. As a rule, farmers joined the Anti-Horse Thief Association, the Grange, or the Modern Woodmen. When the Klan arrived, some fraternalists in Kansas became Knights of the Invisible Empire upon the invitation of their friends.<sup>16</sup> Chalmers explains that the "social order was also a basic American way of doing things, a traditional instru-

<sup>12</sup> "A. H. T. A. Scores," *La Cygne Journal*, October 27, 1922, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Personal Interview, September 9, 1969.

<sup>14</sup> Personal Interview, September 19, 1969.

<sup>8</sup> William Starr Myers, "Know Nothing and Ku Klux Klan," *North American Review*, CCXIX, No. 818 (January 1924), 1-7.

<sup>9</sup> R. A. Patton, "A Ku Klux Klan Reign of Terror," *Current History*, XXVIII, No. 1 (April 1928), 51-55.

<sup>10</sup> Noel P. Gist, *Secret Societies: A Cultural Study of Fraternalism in the United States in The University of Missouri Studies*, XV, No. 4 (October 1, 1940), 35-36, 49.

<sup>11</sup> Mecklin, p. 138.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Wheatly, "The American Protective Association," *Harper's Weekly*, XXXVIII, No. 1975 (October 27, 1894), 1017-18.

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell, p. 238; also see Gard, p. 198.

ment against evil and the weapon of a mass in-group society against corruption, immorality, the outsider, and change.<sup>15</sup> Arthur Corning White asserted that "the middle class American man simply adores ritual, regalia, and 'hokum.' These constitute his greatest social diversion."<sup>16</sup>

For the most part, the leaders in the lodges were important men in their communities, and many of them became the first to don the "pillowships and bedsheets." According to one observer about a particular town, it was thought that the mayor, the bankers, church leaders, merchants, and other civic-minded citizens became members of the Klan because they were first of all fraternalists.<sup>17</sup> The names of many secret orders occur frequently in an early portrait and biographical history of citizens of southeastern Kansas. In addition to the American Protective Association, which was quite active when the history was published, the orders which appeared in the biographical sketches included: Anti-Horse Thief Association, Order of Select Friends, Patriarchs of America, Masons, Odd Fellows, Eastern Star, Knights of Pythias, Modern Woodmen, Woodmen of the World, Mystic Workers of the World, and many others. In a survey of these sketches published in 1894, 181 of the 330 persons recorded were listed as members of at least one secret order. Many men joined several orders. Joseph C. Wells, an attorney and real estate dealer at Erie, belonged to twenty-two different lodges.<sup>18</sup>

In 1920, the small town of Drexel with a population of 500 was typical in that it supported ten active churches and at least eight major fraternal lodges. In addition, there were numerous Sunday School classes and social clubs which met regularly. The social life of the community revolved around its complex system of church, social, and fraternal orders and little else. Chalmers said, "America has long been a nation of joiners, of men bound together for companionship and community purposes."<sup>19</sup>

The Klan entered a society already receptive to fraternal orders using secret passwords, handshakes, and rituals binding members in brotherhood. Many of these organizations restricted membership to Caucasians, adopted distinctive regalia, and claimed patriotic purposes. Thus, these flourishing conditions in every small community and town in Kansas made it respectable for members to join yet another organization promoted on the plain of high principles. The role of secret orders in Kansas from territorial days until the 1920's was significant in Kansans accepting the Ku Klux Klan.

<sup>15</sup> Chalmers, p. 291.

<sup>16</sup> White, *Forum*, LXXII, 638.

<sup>17</sup> Personal Interview, July 4, 1971.

<sup>18</sup> *Portrait and Biographical Record of Southeastern Kansas* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Co., 1894), p. 404.

<sup>19</sup> Chalmers, p. 292.

## V

It has been estimated that in 1923 about 60,000 Kansans owed their allegiance to the Invisible Empire.<sup>1</sup> In 1924 the number increased to its top figure, nearly 100,000.<sup>2</sup> By 1930 there was little to indicate that the Ku Klux Klan had existed in the state.

The order had begun to decline by 1925, and by 1928 even the presidential candidacy of Al Smith, a Catholic, failed to fire the Klan survival. It did not come to an abrupt end on a specific day in eastern Kansas; it just dissolved. To discover the causes of its demise, a number of factors must be taken into consideration.

The adverse press that the Klan received nationally, as well as the negative publicity it received locally in papers like the *Mulberry News*, *Emporia Gazette*, and the *Kansas City Star*, simply added fuel to Klan fires in small communities throughout eastern Kansas. Small townsmen believed that the *Kansas City Star* was allied with "bossism and eastern interests" and was no true friend of midwestern people. Also, newspapers in the East attacking the Klan were believed to favor seaboard banking interests, the long-time enemies of eastern Kansas farmers. To many Kansans, all journalism was under the control of "sinister interests and never told the truth."<sup>3</sup> They concluded truth could best be obtained from local papers or Klan sources. The Klan thrived on this criticism for awhile in its formative period, but in the long-run the relentless opposition of important segments of the press did have an effect in reducing the Klan's prosperity.

Governor Henry J. Allen led the governmental opposition to the Klan, and the necessary ouster suit met success when the Klan failed to gain a charter in Kansas. (See section II.) William Allen White's entry into the gubernatorial contest in 1924 as an outspoken anti-Klan independent candidate further publicized the unfavorable political influence exercised by the Klan members.

Perhaps one of the most important factors in the decline of the Ku Klux Klan was the insistence upon the wearing of the mask. So long as the members wore masks at public gatherings, parades, or forays into the local churches, many who were not members believed that the Klan was an organization made up of cowards. More than one person in small communities agreed with the idea that those who hid behind a mask "must have had something to hide."<sup>4</sup> Another person interviewed voiced the opinion that a real man would not have to wear a mask in order to get things done.<sup>5</sup> The mask created not only suspicion

<sup>1</sup> Richmond, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Chalmers, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> *New Republic*, LIII, 34.

<sup>4</sup> Personal Interview, September 12, 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Personal Interview, September 19, 1969.



and mistrust, but a certain sense of fear, even in those who believed in the principles if not the methods of the Klans.

M. F. Sears, who published the *Mulberry News*, explained his sentiments about the mask in an editorial in 1923. He wrote:

In declining to sign a petition for permission for the Ku Klux Klan to hold its parade last Saturday, the editor of this paper offered to sign the petition if the Klan would agree to parade unmasked.

The Klan mask is the offender. It is intolerable. It is inconceivable to us how a lot of good men are able to justify themselves in concealing their identity in their activity in any effort they regard as necessary and worth while. Any man with red blood in his veins who accounts the objects of the Klan as essential to the perpetuity of this government or to the suppression of crime that is threatening the social order, ought to have the courage to get out in the open and make the fight.<sup>6</sup>

In 1924 Sears quoted a leader of a group of men at Joplin, Missouri, who said, "We intend to tear off the masks of secrecy and make candidates come out in the open and state their stand."<sup>7</sup> In 1927 a writer for *The New Republic* declared that there were those who were determined to stamp out the "rule of mask and lash."<sup>8</sup> Stanley Frost reviewed the retrogression of the Klan for *The World's Work* in February 1928 and concluded, "The refusal to unmask must be ranked as one of the Klan's greatest and growing weaknesses."<sup>9</sup> Still, the Invisible Empire refused to let its members unmask.

In time, many klansmen came to realize that the Ku Klux Klan ran contrary to democratic government. Although claiming to uphold the Constitution, the order actually was an invisible empire within the United States. The ruler of the empire was in essence a dictator who was, himself, invisible. Furthermore, the Klan members ignored the right to a trial by jury, even as they were assessing the guilt or innocence of the "condemned" and dispensing threats or punishments at will. With little more than a vicious propaganda squad to provide evidence, old scandals were revived and threatening letters were sent to the "guilty." In ignoring constitutional civil rights, persecution was levied upon Catholics, blacks, and foreign-born.

Even klansmen came to realize, in time, that all was not as it should be within the Klan. In 1926 the Mulberry Klan newspaper confessed that the organization there had been exploited by an unscrupulous political element within it, and with the "elimination of Headlight control" things

<sup>6</sup> *Mulberry News*, October 12, 1923, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, March 21, 1924, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *New Republic*, LIII, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Frost, "The Masked Politics of the Klan," *The World Work*, LV, No. 4 (February 1928), p. 402.

were vastly improved.<sup>10</sup> Writers in *The Independent* during that year admitted disastrous mistakes in Klan leadership, and that many men had left the organization because of the radical element in control. One person later said in an interview, "Some of the leading businessmen of the town hinted that I should join the Ku Klux Klan, but it was too radical for me. Every time there was a public meeting of any sort, someone got up in a sheet and pillowcase and started making wild statements."<sup>11</sup> By 1926 much damage had been done, and the good will of the non-members of the Klan at Mulberry had been lost.<sup>12</sup>

Although the depression years confirmed the final collapse of the Invisible Empire in eastern Kansas, the order had already fallen into a decline leading to dissolution before hard times made it impossible for members to pay their dues. A major explanation for the collapse of the Ku Klux Klan at the end of the 1920's may be found in its advocacy of prejudices incompatible with those values openly declared by a democratic society.

<sup>10</sup> *The Independent*, February 12, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Personal Interview, September 19, 1969.

<sup>12</sup> *The Independent*, February 12, 1926, p. 1.

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